

The Secret is Out

by liveonpurpose

Category: H2O: Just Add Water

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2011-09-08 13:41:19

Updated: 2011-11-20 04:23:24

Packaged: 2016-04-26 11:55:37

Rating: K+

Chapters: 7

Words: 12,759

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Sophie finds out the girl's secret. She has big plans to expose them, but can Zane and Will talk her out of it and save the girls? Zikki, Wella. No Clewis. I adore Cleo and Lewis, but using fewer characters this time

1. Discovered

Sophie stood at the edge of the beach, watching her brother as he sat with his girlfriend, Bella. She didn't know what it was about that girl, but Sophie didn't like her.

Sophie had worked most of her life to turn her brother, Will, into the best free diver in the world. He met Bella, and less than three months later he'd quit competing completely. Everything Sophie had worked for had been gone in a blink.

Sophie narrowed her eyes as Zane Bennett and his girlfriend, Rikki, joined the other couple. They spoke with each other quietly and then the four of them rose and started off down the beach and out of sight.

They were always going off on their own, usually to Mako island. It was like their private place. Sophie had been out there more than once and she was dying to take an even closer look at the cave, but she had promised her brother that she would leave that place alone.

Sophie crossed her arms over her chest and moodily turned to walk back towards her home. She had tried her hardest to get Zane to see that they were perfect for each other. They were both business minded, and they were both extremely money-minded. Zane just hadn't seen it. Despite Sophie's best efforts, he and Rikki were practically inseparable.

Sophie glumly walked in her front door. She quickly changed into a wetsuit and pulled her hair back tightly. She had been making cash locating pieces of brightly colored coral and ocean stones for a

local fish shop. The job paid well, but she would really prefer a job behind a desk instead of having to be in the water 5 hours a day.

She reluctantly strapped on her shallow water breathing tank and headed on her way down to her boat, which was tied to the dock.

Will, Bella, Rikki, and Zane were headed out to Mako island. The two couples walked down the beach towards Will's boat house. Will and Zane were going to boat out to the island, the girls were going to swim. The couples chatted happily with each other as they walked. Things were wonderful between them. Zane and Will had formed a fragile friendship with one another. They had never gotten along and had fought bitterly with each other after Will had learned the secret. But, with Cleo and Lewis in America, they were forced to spend time with each other and found that they had a bit in common. It also helped that Will was head over heels in love with Bella. Zane no longer felt threatened when Will spent time alone with Rikki.

Rikki and Bella kissed each of their boyfriends before diving into the water. The boys took a quick look around them, just in case anyone had seen the girls jump into the water. After making sure it was all clear, Will untied his boat from the dock and the boys climbed in. Will steered the boat, pointing it towards Mako.

It was an absolutely beautiful day. The sun sparkled on the waves, making the water seem to glitter.

Bella and Rikki happily swam into the moon pool. For the first time in a long time everything felt great. They were both completely in love with boys who were nuts for them, it was the middle of summer on the most beautiful coast, and they'd just graduated high school. They spent a lot of time happily chatting about their plans for the next year. They were planning on going to college together. They excitedly planned for their future together.

Will and Zane got to the pool about twenty five minutes later. They knew the path into the cave by heart. They joined the girls in the pool, hugging them closely.

"It's about time." Rikki, said, giving Zane a tight squeeze in the water.

"Sorry, we can't all swim in." Zane smiled down at her. "Some of us need to take boats sometimes."

"Yeah, yeah..." Bella gave Will a peck on the cheek.

The four spent most of the afternoon in the pool, laughing and talking about unimportant things.

Zane checked his waterproof watch. "Hey, Rikki, we need to get going."

"Is it that late already?" Rikki whined. "Come on, We can be a little late."

"Where do you guys need to be?" Will asked

"Rikki's is hiring a new manager today." Zane explained, referring to the cafe that he and Rikki owned. "We have to be there to hold the interviews."

Rikki screwed up her face. "Right." She said unexcitedly.

The boys climbed out of the pool and stood, dripping water.

"Rikki? You mind?" Zane squeezed water out of his clothes.

"No problem." Rikki help up her hands, drying both Zane and Will in just a couple minutes.

Zane and Will headed back out of the cave, back through the jungle, and out into the boat. They headed back to shore. The girls did the same, swimming quickly. Rikki swam to a secluded piece of beach to dry off, close to the cafe. Bella swam over to Will's boathouse. She pulled herself out of the water, dried off, and waited for Will to return.

Rikki and Zane reached the entrance to the cafe at the exact same time.

"Ready to find a new manager?" Rikki asked, putting an arm around Zane's waist.

"You bet." Zane said confidently as they walked inside.

Bella sat at the dock in front of Will's boathouse for about thirty minutes before she heard the purr of the boat on the water.

Will had dropped Zane off and headed straight back home. He carefully tied off the boat and joined Bella on the dock.

"Hey you," He said as he smiled at his beautiful girlfriend.

Bella returned his smile. "Hey back."

"Want to go in?" Zane gestured to the front door.

Bella nodded. The pair walked into the boathouse. They sat and shot the breeze, throwing in a kiss here and there.

Sophie was exhausted. She'd been swimming all afternoon and hadn't come up with much coral. She wanted to be done for the day, but she knew she hadn't collected enough to sell back to the fish store. Sophie decided to travel further down the shore. She would end up near where Will lived, and if he was home he could just boat her back to the shop when she was finished.

Sophie climbed out of the water and headed down the beach towards Will's. She was exhausted and she was ill. She couldn't stop thinking about Will, and how he'd let her down. He had quit competing, and he had stopped her from collecting the rare stones she had found in the moon pool. It was his fault she was so hard up. She reached Will's place. Reluctantly, she pulled back on her oxygen mask and dove into the water. No one else ever dove here since it was so far out of the way. She found a substantial amount of coral to look through, and soon she was preoccupied with it.

Will and Bella had been cuddling on the couch for a bit. They mostly talked about their plans for the rest of summer. Soon their conversation turned to swimming. Will was a talented swimmer and could hold his breath forever. They loved to tease each other.

"All I'm saying, is that I could swim deeper than you." Will laughed as he pinched Bella's side."

"Yeah, ha ha, right." Bella laughed.

"No, I could! And then I could probably swim further than you too." Will defended himself. "I'm an excellent swimmer."

"I know you are, sweetie." Bella pulled Will's face close to hers. "But you aren't as good as me."

"Care to test it?" Will said, smiling.

Will picked Bella up, carrying her like a child to the front door.

Bella playfully kicked her legs, pretending to protest. She loved when Will played tough. Will carried her through the door and out onto the dock.

"Last chance to admit that I'm the better swimmer." He said playfully, threatening to throw her into the water.

"Never." Bella said defiantly.

"Alright then, you must accept the consequences!" Will drew back, then threw Bella out into the water.

Sophie had been behind a particular large arrangement of coral when Bella hit the water, no less than fifteen feet away. It shocked her, she hadn't been ready for the surprise. Sophie quickly hid herself behind the coral. She recognized that the person in the water was Bella, and, irritated, she started to move out from behind her hiding place.

Just then, Sophie watched as something weird happened to Bella. Under the water, her legs extended and connected to form... Sophie squinted... a fin? Sophie looked closer. A fin! She had seen her change from a normal girl into a freak! A... mermaid?

Sophie had to keep herself from shouting out underwater and wasting her oxygen. She couldn't believe what she was seeing. She quickly positioned herself behind the coral and seaweed she'd been looking at. She knew that Bella couldn't see her in her hiding place.

Sophie watched Bella swimming. Sophie had dollar signs in her eyes. Bella was a mermaid. Imagine the scientific experiments that could be performed on her... Imagine what people would pay to see her... Sophie stopped. Poor Will, what would he say when he found out? He would be crushed. For just a second Sophie felt bad. She didn't want to hurt her brother.

At that moment, a second person dove into the water. Sophie watched as Will swam to Bella. He pulled her close to him and kissed her

underwater.

Sophie was stunned. Will knew? He knew that Bella was some kind of abnormal fish?

Sophie hid as Will and Bella broke the kiss and swam away from the dock hand in hand.

Sophie couldn't make her brain form coherent thoughts. If she hadn't seen it with her own eyes she never would have believed it.

Sophie quickly climbed out of the water, dropping her coral. She knew where she was headed. She took off towards Rikki's Cafe. She needed to talk to the only other person she knew who would understand the possibilities of what she'd just seen. Someone who would be all too eager to discuss what plan of action would make the most money.

Zane.

2. Sharing the news

Sophie marched into the cafe without hesitation. She stopped short when she saw a line of people stretching into the office.

"Hey, you," Sophie approached a brunette girl who was waiting in line. "What's everyone waiting for?"

The girl narrowed her eyes at Sophie's rude tone. "The cafe is hiring a new manager." She answered.

The wheels in Sophie's head turned. She joined the end of the line. She would just wait her turn to have a private meeting with Zane. This would give her time to get her thoughts in line.

The line crawled slowly. Sophie waited impatiently. There were still 3 people in front of her when Rikki came walking through of the office door. Sophie quickly tried to step out of Rikki's sight. She hadn't expected Rikki to be there.

Rikki was more than a little surprised to see a familiar, and unwelcome, red head of hair. Sophie was not welcome in the cafe. Rikki marched over to Sophie.

"What are you doing in here?" She asked brusquely.

Sophie looked at her confidently. "I have something to discuss with Zane."

Rikki laughed. "Really? Get out of here, Sophie. You aren't welcome here."

"But-" Sophie protested.

"Out." Rikki said firmly.

Sophie glared at Rikki. She swiftly turned on her heel and stalked out of the cafe. She would wait until Rikki left. She knew Rikki didn't like to work much.

Rikki walked back into the office, shutting the door behind her.
"That was weird." She said.

"Hmm?" Zane looked up. "What is it?"

"Sophie." Rikki said, taking a seat.

"Sophie?" Zane scrunched up his face. "What is she doing here?"

"I guess she thought she'd apply for the job?" Rikki shrugged.

Zane laughed. "Apply for the job we just fired her from?"

Rikki rolled her eyes. Sophie was a piece of work. Rikki smiled at Zane as he typed on the computer. She was glad Zane could finally see what a troublemaker Sophie really was.

Rikki's phone chimed. She picked it up and read the message that had arrived.

"Aw, shoot." Rikki put the phone down and picked up her bag. "Zane, sweetie, I've got to go. I was supposed to meet the fruit distributor five minutes ago."

"See you after work?" Zane reached for her hand.

"You bet." Rikki gave Zane a quick kiss and hurried out the door.

Sophie watched Rikki hurry from the cafe and walk away. She wondered if Rikki knew what Bella was. She figured she probably did. Did Zane know too? No way. He'd never be able to keep a goldmine like that quiet. Sophie had known she wouldn't have to wait long for Rikki to take off. She walked in the door to the cafe and straight back to the office. She knocked once and pushed open the door without waiting for Zane to tell her to come in.

"Zane I have something to tell you." Sophie announced.

Zane frowned at Sophie's interruption. "Excuse me? Sophie you aren't welcome here."

"Oh, I think you'll want to hear what I have to say." Sophie said with a smirk on her face.

"No, I don't." Zane stood and crossed to the door. He opened it and stood aside, clearly waiting for Sophie to walk out of the room.

Sophie took one step closer to Zane. "What if I told you that I've found something, or someone, who could make us millionaires? All it takes is the right kind of management."

"Sophie, I've told you I want nothing to do with you. Please leave--"

"It's Bella," Sophie said proudly.

Zane paled. What exactly did Sophie know about Bella? Zane quickly

shut the office door and turned the lock.

"What about her?" He asked hesitantly.

"I thought that would get your attention." Sophie said smugly. "Have a seat, let's talk." She had known the prospect of making that much money would convince him to listen to her.

Zane quickly sat behind his desk. He had to find out what Sophie knew. Had she seen Bella using her powers?

Zane leaned forward "So how exactly is Bella going to make us millionaires?"

Sophie relished his attention. She gave a sly smile. She wasn't about to blurt this out right away. "Let's just say there's something about her that makes her... special. The kind of special that people would pay a ton of money to see."

Zane swallowed. How had she found out? "H-how exactly?" He stammered.

"Ok, I know you're never going to believe this, but trust me. I saw it with my own eyes." Sophie took a deep breath and leaned forward over the desk until she and Zane were face to face.

"Bella is a mermaid."

Zane's eyes widened. He choked on his own breath in shock. He stood up, trying to stop coughing.

"I know, I know," Sophie stood as well. "It sounds crazy. If I hadn't seen it myself I would never have believed it either. But it's definitely true, I mean-"

Zane cut her off quickly. "How do you know this?"

Sophie was pleased at his shocked expression. "Let's just say I was in the right place at the right time."

Zane paced around the office, thinking hard. Sophie knew about Bella. Did she know about Rikki? What did she plan to do about any of this? Zane quickly made his face look unworried.

"Are you joking? That's ridiculous. There's no such thing as mermaids." Zane said skeptically.

"That's what I thought too, but Zane," Sophie stepped up close to Zane's face. "I saw her turn. I saw her go into the water with legs and then I saw her... change into something different!"

"She may have been playing a trick on you?" Zane was grasping at straws.

Sophie narrowed her eyes. "Zane, she had no idea I was even there."

Zane dropped into his chair with a loud sigh. He didn't know quite what to say.

Sophie walked around to stand behind Zane. She leaned over, speaking into his ear. "You should be aware, Rikki probably knows."

Zane felt a mixture of relief and panic, causing him to break out into a cold sweat. Sophie didn't know about Rikki.

"So..." Zane turned to face Sophie. "What do you plan to do next?"

"Well," Sophie's face lit up, "First things first, we find out exactly what she is. We'll need to get her alone. She changed when she hit the water, so if we get her somewhere where no one can see us we can pour a cup of water on her and see what happens." Sophie turned to walk around the room, lost in thought. "We can take some pictures too. And then it's just a matter of finding the highest bidder."

"Bidder?" Zane's heart sank. "You're going to tell people about her?"

Sophie crossed her arms over her chest. "How else do you expect to make any money?"

Zane stood to face Sophie. "Yeah, but... it's Bella. She's my friend. And what about Will?"

Sophie shrugged. "She's an abomination, Zane. Who knows what kind of magic she's used on your brain? And as for Will, well," Sophie shuffled her feet a bit, "he's made his decisions in life. And I've made mine. He's made it quite clear that he is looking after his own best interest. I'm just doing the same thing."

The truth was that Sophie could not believe that Will hadn't told her about Bella. After he screwed Sophie over and threw her under the bus by stopping free diving Sophie had thought he was done treating her like she didn't matter. Apparently he didn't care about his sister's well being.

Zane's face was unreadable. He was very deep in thought.

"Zane." Sophie made him snap out of it. "What should we do first?" She looked at him expectantly. "I came to you because I knew you'd have the perfect plan."

Zane was freaking out and trying hard not to show it. "Umm..." he stalled. "Why don't you... let me think on it overnight. We'll talk first thing tomorrow."

Sophie looked pleased. She had made quite an impression on Zane today. Let him tell her they didn't work great together, she was proving him wrong.

"Great." She said with a smile. "I'll be here at, say, 8 in the morning?"

Zane just nodded, looking out the window. Sophie gathered up her bag and started toward the door.

"Sophie!" Zane spun around.

"Yes?" She stopped.

"Listen, don't tell anyone about this. Anyone." Zane said, dead serious.

"Ha," Sophie laughed. "As if I'm going to blab the biggest discovery ever to just anyone."

Sophie winked and strutted out the door.

The second the door clicked shut behind her Zane lunged for his phone. He dialed with shaking fingers and held the phone to his ear nervously.

"Rikki?" Zane stammered. "You need to get here right now. We have a problem."

3. They tried

Rikki, Will, Bella, and Zane sat in Will's boat house in silence. Zane had just finished telling everyone about Sophie's 'news.' No one knew quite what to say first. Will spoke up eventually.

"I'm sorry guys," He said, shaking his head. "This is my fault."

"No, stop." Rikki held up her hands. "This isn't yours or anyone's fault. We just need to figure out what to do about it."

The group thought hard.

"Ok." Bella raised her voice. "She thinks it's just me, right?"

Zane nodded.

"So..." Bella continued. "We just need to convince her I'm normal, right?"

"Right." Rikki confirmed. "But how are we supposed to do that? You ARE a mermaid."

Bella didn't have an answer for that.

"When are you supposed to meet her?" Will looked at Zane as he spoke.

"Tomorrow morning." Zane stood and wandered around the room as he thought hard.

"I'll talk to her." Will offered. "I'll try to convince her to stop this. She'll listen to me."

"You think so?" Bella looked at him. "Will, she hates me. She blames me for you not competing any more. And you guys aren't exactly on the best of terms." She added.

"I know, but she's my sister." Will said. "It's worth a try?"

Bella and Rikki nodded. Zane wasn't so sure. He had seen the

determination in Sophie's eyes. Still, what other choice did they have?

The group stood. Will and Bella stepped towards the door.

Will pulled Bella in for a tight hug.

"Good luck," Bella said nervously.

"I'll be back soon. No worries." Will reassured her.

Will left the group sitting tensely inside and walked briskly towards Sophie's. He reached her apartment in a few minutes and walked in the front door without knocking. Sophie looked up in surprise. After she realized it was Will the look of surprise quickly changed to one of smugness.

"I assume you've spoken to Zane." Sophie said, raising an eyebrow.

Will nodded.

"Ah." Sophie stood, rubbing her hands together. "I didn't expect him to tell you that we knew about... Bella."

"Well he did." Will walked to stand right in front of Sophie. "And we need to talk."

Sophie crossed her arms over her chest. "So talk," She said coolly.

Will's expression softened. "Listen, sister, please. Don't do this to Bella."

Sophie laughed. "Why not, Will? Why not? I've worked my entire life trying to be successful. Every time I think I've finally done it everything seems to just fall apart. And here is the perfect opportunity to go down in the books and you don't want me to. Yet again."

Will stepped close to her, looking at her intensely. "I know I've made things tough for you."

"Tough?" Sophie said indignantly. "Let's talk about tough. You quit free diving just as you were about to get discovered. Because of HER. You stopped me from collecting the blue stones off Mako island. We could have been set for life and you made me stop. Well, I've had enough of it."

Sophie plopped down on the couch and flipped on the television. She didn't look at Will as she spoke. "I'm done, Will. I deserve a break and I've found one."

Will walked to stand in between Sophie and the TV. "Soph, I love her." He pleaded.

"No you don't." Sophie sighed.

Will narrowed his eyes. "Yes, I do." He said emphatically.

Sophie looked up at him. "She's not human, Will. She's done something to your brain."

"No, Soph, no she hasn't. She's perfectly normal, just... a little different."

Sophie gave a harsh laugh. "You'll thank me for this someday, Will. Trust me."

Will shook his head and looked at his feet. He'd grown up with his sister and he recognized the look on her face. Will let out a frustrated exhale and started toward the door.

"Wait," Sophie called to him.

Will turned and waited for her to speak.

"So what did Zane say to you?" Sophie was incredibly curious. Zane had warned her not to tell a soul. She was surprised that Zane had approached Will.

Will looked at Sophie with unreadable eyes. "Ask him yourself," He said as he walked out the door.

Will walked home briskly. He hadn't known how to answer her question about Zane. They could come up with the answer to that after he got back to the group.

Sophie turned off the TV, thinking hard. It wasn't like Zane to tip their hand that way. If Will knew that they knew then surely Bella knew as well. What if they tried to leave town or keep Bella hidden? They would need to move quickly. Sophie trusted Zane, she knew he would take advantage of this once in a lifetime opportunity. But she definitely questioned his judgement at the moment.

Sophie picked up the phone and the phone book. She quickly set up appointments for the next evening. She called three marine biologists, the marine park, and two news stations. She didn't give any details, she just told each of them that she had something that would blow their minds and that they would need to meet with her if they wanted in.

Sophie hung up the phone, satisfied with herself. She and Zane could set their plan tomorrow.

When Will walked into the boat house everyone was sitting exactly where he'd left them. Zane, Bella, and Rikki looked up at him hopefully when he entered. Each of their faces fell as Will shook his head.

"No luck?" Rikki asked.

"No." Will said dejectedly. "She's pretty dead set on this."

"You tried," Bella tried to comfort him, but she was distracted with worry about her future.

"Oh, and we'll need to figure out what you said to me, Zane." Will looked at him. "She was asking about it."

"Ok." Zane nodded. "When I meet with her tomorrow I'll tell her that I felt like I should talk to you because we're friends. She'll believe me."

"What do we do now?" Rikki asked.

Zane answered her. "Both of you need to stay far away from the water. Don't give her any opportunity to catch you. Either of you," He said as he looked at Rikki.

Rikki gave a small nod. She was so worried for Bella. And, she realized, she was afraid for herself. Sophie was not an enemy she wanted to deal with.

Rikki and Zane left shortly after that. They agreed that the best thing for all of them to do was to act perfectly normal, though they would need to avoid water. Bella would spend a little while longer with Will before she headed to her own home.

Zane put his arm around Rikki's shoulders protectively as they walked. Rikki reached an arm around Zane's waist and pulled him close.

"What are you going to say to Sophie tomorrow?" Rikki asked.

Zane sighed. "I don't know yet. I'm going to try to convince her not to do this though."

"Is there anything I can do?" Rikki looked up at him.

Zane looked back sharply. "No, Rikki. Don't do anything. Stay far away from Sophie." Zane stopped walking and held Rikki's hands in his. "I'm going to protect you."

Rikki wrapped her arms around Zane's neck and gave him an intense kiss. "I know you are." She said quietly.

Zane walked Rikki to her front door and kissed her goodbye before heading to his own home. He checked in with both Bella and Will before sitting down to brainstorm about tomorrow's meeting.

All five of them were up most of the night, but for different reasons. Zane was up late thinking, trying to find the perfect way to stop Sophie's plan. Will tossed and turned. He couldn't quit blaming himself for this whole mess. If he hadn't tossed Bella into the water Sophie wouldn't know anything. He should have been more careful. Rikki tried as hard as she could to drift off to sleep, but every time she drifted away she was bombarded with dreams about Bella locked in a fish tank. Bella's eyes barely closed. She was trying as hard as she could to think of a way to trick Sophie into thinking she was perfectly normal.

Only Sophie was up late for a reason that made her happy. Her thoughts were filled with excited plans for fame and fortune.

The next morning found Sophie fresh-faced and practically skipping into Zane's office.

The cafe hadn't opened for business yet that day, so Sophie and Zane had the place to themselves. Sophie breezed into the office, swung the door shut behind her, and primly perched in the chair opposite the desk. She smoothed her back skirt over her knees before looking expectantly at Zane.

"Beautiful morning, isn't it?" She said with a smile that almost passed as a smirk.

Zane had been coaching himself all night on how to talk to Sophie. He had a few ideas, but nothing fool proof. He had decided to go with the easiest one first. Try to talk Sophie out of it. He and Will had tried yesterday and she'd been stone, but she'd had a night to think it over. It was at least worth a shot.

Zane focused on Sophie, who was still waiting for him to answer her.

"Oh, yeah it is." Zane said throatily. He took a second to compose himself before continuing. He crossed his arms over his chest and narrowed his eyes at her.

"We need to talk." He said seriously.

"Duh, Zane," Sophie rolled her eyes. "That's why I'm here." She leaned forward excitedly. "What's the plan?"

"There isn't one." Zane stood, his arms still crossed tightly. "Sophie, we can't do this to Bella. She's our friend. She's your brother's girlfriend. It isn't right." He looked at her with pleading eyes.

Sophie's face was grim as she answered Zane coldly. "She's not my friend, is she? And the more I think about it, the more I wonder what kind of magic she's worked on my brother. We could be saving him by getting him away from her and her freakish magic spells."

Zane closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. "She can't do magic spells, Sophie." He said exasperatedly.

"How would you know?" Sophie said hotly.

Zane froze. He quickly composed himself. He would need to do a better job of playing this role if he intended to do any good.

"It's just ridiculous, that's all." Zane shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. "She seems normal, I think I would notice if she could do magic."

"You didn't notice that she was a mermaid." Sophie said pointedly.

"No, but I'd notice if she was doing spells on us." Zane argued back.

"How do you know?" Sophie raised her eyebrows. She stood, placing her hands on her hips defiantly. "I'm disappointed in you, Zane. I came to you because you have the best business mind I know. And you're flaking on me? This is the opportunity of a lifetime."

Sophie and Zane looked at each other in silence for several seconds. Breaking the stare, Sophie reached for her bag.

"That's fine. Do what you want. I can do this without you." She said, spinning on her heel and starting for the door.

"No, no, Sophie wait." Zane caught her by the elbow, stopping her.

Sophie turned to look at Zane, the corner of her mouth twitching. She loved his attention. "Why?" She asked.

"I'm sorry. You're right." Zane left his hand on her arm as he spoke, trying to convince Sophie to stay. Obviously, his 'talk her out of it' plan wasn't going to work. He hadn't really expected it to, but it was worth the try. Sophie's face was set. She wasn't backing down anytime soon, he could tell.

"I am, aren't I?" Sophie answered smugly. She placed her hand over Zane's and squeezed his fingers.

Zane quickly stepped back from her, pulling his hand away. "Yeah, you are. Sit down, Soph, let's make out a plan." He managed a grin. "How many millions do you think we'll make?"

Sophie giggled. "Hundreds."

Sophie sat down primly. "So what do we do first?" She asked with a smile.

"Ok." Zane thought fast. "First things first, we'll need to make sure Bella really is a..."

"Mermaid." Sophie finished.

"Right. We'll need to get her alone to test it." Zane spoke quickly. "But, that also means that she'll know that we know what she is, and she could try to skip town."

"Correct." Sophie nodded.

"She trusts me." Zane said carefully. "I'll convince her to come with me. Then we can test things out."

Sophie beamed at Zane happily. "Perfect. Where will we take her?"

Zane wracked his brain. "We'll have her join me at... Mako Island? It's secluded. I don't think hardly anyone ever goes out there."

"And you can get her there without her suspecting anything?" Sophie stood beside Zane. She tilted her head towards his as she spoke.

Zane nodded. "Yeah, I can."

Sophie stepped in a little closer. "How soon can you get her to go out there?"

Zane took a step backwards as he checked the time. "Two hours." He said finally.

"Great." And evil smile pulled across Sophie's face. She didn't tell Zane about the meetings she had set up. She had an odd feeling about him. She would see how things went this afternoon before letting him in on the fact that she'd already started spreading the word.

"I'll have her there at 10:30," Zane said. "I'll think of a way to keep her preoccupied. You get to the island at 10:45. Meet us at that weird pool, the one where we found the blue stones. I'll bring a camera."

Sophie nodded enthusiastically. "Fantastic."

Zane sighed, trying not to look as worried as he felt. "Great, I'll see you in a bit then."

Sophie gave Zane one last grin as she picked up her purse and walked for the door. "Get ready, Zane. Our lives are getting ready to change."

The door clicked shut behind her, leaving Zane alone in the office. He sank into his desk chair, rubbing his forehead as he sat. He allowed himself a few seconds of silence before he reached for his phone. A phone call and fifteen minutes later, he was at his house with Rikki, Bella, and Will. He took a couple minutes to catch them up on the meeting.

"She expects me to be there in two hours?" Bella panicked. "And what are we going to do then?"

"I don't know," Zane paced as he spoke. "But I had to keep her thinking I was supporting her."

"By telling her that you'd trap Bella?" Will spoke up.

"Sophie came to me because of my mind for business." Zane stopped pacing and faced Will. "So I made the same suggestion I would have made if I was really on her side."

"It's ok." Rikki held her hands up. "Let's not argue. Let's just figure out what to do."

The group tossed out idea after idea, but they couldn't come up with anything that had a chance of working. An hour passed quickly. They only had a small chunk of time before Zane and Bella were due to meet Sophie at Mako.

"Listen, guys." Bella spoke up. "College is starting soon, why don't I just get out of town? Stay with relatives somewhere?"

"We can't let you do that." Rikki said comfortingly. "We're in this together."

"Plus," Zane reasoned. "She would look for you. She wouldn't give up just because you took off. It would only be a matter of time before she found you."

"He's right." Will nodded. "She's determined."

"So what do we do?" Rikki asked.

They were stumped again. The minutes ticked by, too fast. They ended up coming up with a plan. It was a shaky one at best, and none of them were convinced that it would work, but it's all they had. Zane and Rikki made a hasty trip to the hardware store. They made it back in a matter of minutes. Bella hugged Will tightly, holding onto him.

"Tell me it's all going to be fine." she said quietly.

"It's going to be fine." Will said back.

Neither of them were terribly convinced. Will and Bella shared a long kiss before she climbed into the boat with Zane.

Zane and Bella left the dock, leaving Will and Rikki standing there.

Bella looked over at Zane as they skimmed across the water.

"Thank you." She said. "For all of your help. I really appreciate it."

"Of course." Zane put a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "Your secret is Rikki's secret too. I'll help any way I can."

Bella and Zane had never been incredibly close, but at that moment she found that she trusted him completely.

They arrived at Mako without incident. Zane hauled the boat up onto the shore and helped Bella climb out onto the dry sand. They quickly picked their way through the trees and into the cavern that housed the moon pool. They had 20 minutes before Sophie was due to be there.

5. Cover up

Bella looked around the moon pool. She couldn't believe she was scared to be there, this place had always comforted her.

"Are we ready?" Bella asked Zane nervously.

"Getting there." Zane said as he opened the bag they'd brought from the hardware store. They'd bought several bottles of industrial oil, the kind construction companies use to waterproof pipes to protect them from getting rusted.

It was the only plan they'd been able to come up with. They were going to try to bluff their way out of this mess. Sophie didn't know anything about mermaids other than that Bella had changed when she hit the water. She didn't know about the powers the girls had.

Zane sprayed a layer of the oil over Bella's arm with an aerosol can, then picked up a pot of the oil and a paint brush and spread on a layer of thick oil that almost looked like gel.

"It's really shiny..." Bella said doubtfully.

"That's what the powder is for." Zane said confidently. This was going to work. It had to.

Zane was very worried for Bella, but he was more worried about Rikki. If Sophie found out about Bella it was only a matter of time before she figured out that Rikki was a mermaid too. Rikki had offered to come along with Zane and Bella, but Zane wouldn't let her. He wanted to keep Rikki as safe as possible.

"Ok. Let's test." Zane filled a small cup with water and held it over Bella's arm. "Are you ready? Remember what to do?"

Bella nodded nervously.

Zane poured the water carefully over Bella's arm in a very thin layer. As the water hit Bella's arm she twisted her hand slightly, turning the liquid into a thin, watery gel. The gel slid off her arm easily and onto the sand.

"1, 2, 3, 4,..." Bella counted out loud. "5, 6, 7, 8, 9...10."

Bella looked down at herself. "No fin!" She said excitedly.

"No fin..." Zane breathed. A wave of relief washed over Zane. They could pull this off. Quickly, he began spraying and spreading the thick oil over Bella's arms, neck, face, and legs.

"Ick." Bella screwed up her face as a bit of the oil got into her mouth.

"Sorry." Zane apologized with a smile. He was optimistic.

Zane brushed a thin layer of face powder over the oil. It still looked a little weird, but only if you really looked closely. Zane checked his watch.

"She'll be here any minute." He said quietly, looking towards the entrance. "You ready?"

"She's crazy." Bella recited. "It was just a costume, I can show it to her if she wants to see it." Neither of them thought that Sophie would take them up on that, but Rikki and Will were on call in case they needed to construct one.

"And?" Zane pushed.

"And you believe me completely." Bella grinned. "And Sophie's crazy." She repeated for good measure.

"And don't let her touch you." Zane reminded her. "She'll feel the oil."

"I wouldn't want her to touch me anyway." Bella said grimly.

"I know the feeling." Zane walked to stand along the edge of the cave. He could hear footsteps coming distantly through the cave.

"She's coming." Zane whispered.

Instantly, Bella wiped her face into one of curiosity. She stood innocently along the wall of the cave opposite Zane. Zane crossed his arms over his chest and looked serious. Both of them held their breath as Sophie made her entrance into the cave.

"Hello, Zane." She cooed as she strutted over to him.

"Zane, what is going on?" Bella's face gave away nothing.

"Don't act like you don't know, mermaid." Sophie's eyes narrowed.

Bella's eyes flew wide open. "What?" She managed to choke out before she dissolved into laughter. "What did you just call me?"

Sophie took a step closer to Bella, who stepped back instinctively. "I saw you." Sophie's voice was ice cold. "In the water with my brother. I saw you turn into a fish."

"Oh, that!" Bella laughed some more. "Seriously, Sophie? That was a costume."

"No it wasn't." Sophie's voice steeled even more. "I know what I saw."

"Oh please, Sophie." Bella spoke to her as if she was a child. "It was a costume. I ordered it from London. We were just trying it out."

"Do you really expect me to believe that?" Sophie started to walk towards Bella but Zane cut her off.

"Sophie, the way I see it, this is a pretty easy problem to solve." Zane's voice was emotionless.

"Zane?" Bella looked at him in shock. "You don't actually think she's right, do you?"

"I think we'll find out soon enough." Zane took the cup and dipped it into the moon pool. He walked to stand right in front of Bella with his back to Sophie. "Ready?" He mouthed soundlessly.

Bella gave an almost imperceptible nod.

Sophie stood watching with one hip popped out and her arms crossed over her chest. She already had her I-told-you-so look on her smug face.

Zane met Bella's eyes as he held the cup out. Bella held her arm up in the air impatiently.

"This is so stupid." Bella rolled her eyes.

Zane turned the cup upside down over Bella's arm. Once again, Bella carefully twisted her fingers. The water gelled and slid easily off of her oiled skin and dripped onto the sand below her.

Zane stepped back next to Sophie as he examined Bella. He was trying

hard to keep his breathing normal. "Well, Sophie, it looks like you were mistaken." He managed to get out calmly.

"No." Sophie shook her head firmly. "I'm not. It took a while last time. We need to wait."

"That's because I was getting my costume ready." Bella huffed. "Honestly, Sophie, this is ridiculous."

"That was NOT a costume." Sophie said angrily. "Maybe you just didn't use enough water, Zane." Sophie began to march towards Bella.

"Whoa, Sophie, do you have any idea how much I paid for this dress?" Bella said crossly. "If you get my clothes wet I'll sue you for \$900."

That made Sophie pause. Ok, she could play cool. Sophie slid her eyes over to where Zane was standing, with his eyes locked on Bella's. He had a peculiar look on his face. For the very first time, Sophie seriously wondered if Zane didn't already know about Bella. What if Zane had weakened?

Sophie had never thought that Zane would never be able to keep a secret like that without profiting off of it, but what if she was wrong? Zane had tried to talk her out of exposing Bella, Zane had been the one to name the place, Zane had brought Bella here... Was Zane in on it?

No way. Sophie had known Zane a while and she'd never known him to be so foolish. But still... Sophie looked at Zane closely and took a couple steps towards him.

"Zane..." She started. "Is anything wrong?"

"Wrong?" Zane looked at Sophie curiously. "Why would anything be wrong?"

"I dunno," Sophie looked at Zane sharply. "You just seem a little off, Zane. It's almost like you're relieved?"

"Relieved?" Zane laughed. "Sophie, face it. You were wrong."

"I wasn't wrong." Sophie said angrily. "I SAW her change into a mermaid."

"Mermaids aren't real." Bella said with a smirk. "Do you believe in Ariel too?"

"I know what saw." Sophie spoke quietly. Somehow speaking quietly made her sound even more intimidating than when she was yelling.

"You saw wrong." Zane said firmly. "Sophie, we got her wet. Nothing happened."

Sophie reevaluated Zane. He stood in front of Bella in an unmistakably defensive stance. Something was up, she could tell.

"Maybe you're right." Sophie backed away from the two of them. "I

guess I could have just seen wrong." She shrugged.

"Yeah." Zane stepped up to Sophie. "Don't worry about it, Soph. It was just too good to be true."

"Right." Sophie turned to walk out of the cave. She paused in the entrance and turned back to Zane. "Sorry to have dragged you out here, Zane. Since it didn't turn out to be much of anything." Sophie spared one glaring look at Bella before she turned and marched out of the cavern.

Bella and Zane froze as they heard Sophie's footsteps face into the distance. They waited several seconds after the last footstep faded away. The cave was so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

"We did it!" Bella squealed as she leaped into Zane's arms.

The friends hugged each other tightly, filled with relief. Zane couldn't stop smiling. It had almost seemed too simple, tricking Sophie.

"Well I guess that's done." Zane said with a grin.

"Thank you." Bella's face went serious for a second. "For all your help. Seriously, thank you so much."

"Hey, no problem." Zane said casually as he retrieved the bottles of oil from where he'd hidden them in the sand. He packed them back in the bag and then pulled his phone out of his pocket and held it out to Bella.

"Do you want to tell Will and Rikki the good news or should I?" Zane asked, unable to hold back a smile.

Bella took the phone enthusiastically and dialed Will's number. Zane finished cleaning up as Bella relayed what had happened in the cave with Sophie.

The pair headed out of the cave. They had decided that it would be a good idea for Bella and Rikki to stay out of the water for the next few days, just in case Sophie was keeping an eye on them.

The boat carried them quickly over the water and towards the dock outside Zane's house.

"It almost seems like it was too simple, doesn't it?" Bella asked as Zane tied off the boat.

The same feeling had been getting at Zane during their ride. "I think she didn't ever actually believe it herself." He said practically.

"Yeah, I bet you're right." Bella said, still not convinced. It wasn't like Sophie to give up on something so easily.

Before Bella could think any more on the subject she was pulled into a bone-crushing hug.

"Will!" Bella's smile glowed. She gave Will a long, hard kiss as he spun her around.

"Hey you." Rikki poked Zane in the shoulder.

Zane hugged Rikki to him closely as she tucked her head into his shoulder. Zane ran his fingers through Rikki's hair as they stood there quietly.

"Everything is fine." He said comfortingly.

Zane still had the feeling that everything had worked out a little too perfectly, but he certainly wasn't complaining about it.

The four of them walked towards Zane's house pair by pair, eager to relax for the evening.

Sophie watched the four of them from a hiding spot behind a bush about a hundred feet away. Her eyes widened as she watched Zane holding Rikki. Why would he be comforting her? Was Rikki that torn up over Bella?

Sophie's eyes widened even more as she took everything in. Rikki definitely knew about Bella. It was clear from the way she and Zane were celebrating as they threw smiles over to Bella and Will. So maybe that's why Zane was hesitant about exposing Bella? He didn't want to upset Rikki?

Sophie smirked to herself. She wasn't done with Bella just yet, It was only a matter of finding just the right time and place to expose her.

6. Not good enough

Zane, Rikki, Will, and Bella had spent the last hour in Zane's living room. Will and Bella were draped over one couch together, and Zane and Rikki were sitting closely on the loveseat. They'd spent the time laughing and celebrating, incredibly relieved now that the drama was over.

"We do still need to be very careful." Rikki said seriously.

"Don't worry." Will looked up sheepishly. "I won't go throwing Bella in the water anymore."

Bella giggled and held Will close. "Stop blaming yourself, everything turned out fine."

Zane was the only member of the group that was not completely relaxed. He just had a niggling feeling in the back of his head. Something had seemed off with Sophie that day. But what? They'd pulled it off, she'd seen Bella get wet and nothing happened. Still... Zane just couldn't quite relax just yet.

"Well, I think," Rikki stood. "That we should go get a celebratory juice. The cafe's treat."

"Sounds good to me." Bella joined Rikki. "I'm parched."

Will met Zane's eye. "Yes, dear." The both said sarcastically as they followed their girlfriends out the door.

The two couples walked happily down the path towards Rikki's cafe. They pushed the beaded door aside and walked into the brightly lit juice bar. All four of them stopped short as they stepped inside.

Sophie was sitting at a table facing the entrance to the cafe. She stood as they entered.

"Act normal, act normal." Rikki muttered under her breath as she led the group to a table on the far side of the room.

They all sat down casually. Sophie approached the table, an apologetic smile on her face. The group looked up at her warily.

"Zane?" Sophie said sweetly. "Might I have a word? In private?"

"Um, sure." Zane said uncertainly. "I mean, yes I guess." His face changed to one of disinterest. He led Sophie to his office in the back of the cafe.

Rikki, Bella, and Will watched them closely. They exchanged matching looks of curiosity as the door swung shut behind Sophie.

"What is it?" Zane said disinterestedly. He took a seat behind his desk.

"Oh, nothing much." Sophie said sadly. "I just wanted to apologize to you. For wasting your time earlier." Sophie shook her head. "I have no idea what I was thinking. Bella. A mermaid? I'm so silly sometimes." Sophie laughed as she looked at Zane out of the corner of her eye.

Zane nodded. "Don't worry about it. We all make mistakes."

Sophie examined Zane, and he met her gaze firmly. For a moment it felt as if the pair were in a poker match, each keeping a close eye on the other.

"So you definitely think Bella is a normal girl?" Sophie raised her eyebrows in innocent curiosity.

Zane shrugged but didn't blink. "I think we both saw her for ourselves. I poured water right on her. Nothing happened. You were wrong."

"Yeah, you're right." Sophie said thoughtfully. "You know, it's just so weird. I could have sworn I had seen her change into a mermaid."

"Well, maybe you should get your eyes checked out." Zane said with finality. He pulled open the office door and stepped aside, clearly waiting for Sophie to walk out.

"Ah." Sophie realized that their talk was over. "Well, like I said, I'm very sorry. I do hope we can still be friends?"

"Were we ever really friends, Sophie?" Zane asked her, his face unreadable.

"I guess not." Sophie said lightly as she stepped past him and breezed out of the office.

Sophie was gone by the time Zane shut the office door behind him and rejoined the group.

"What was that all about?" Rikki asked curiously.

"She wanted to... apologize?" Zane raised his shoulders.

"Apologize?" Will screwed up his face. "That doesn't sound very much like my sister."

"No, it doesn't." Bella said, confused.

"Zane, are you sure everything went all right at the moon pool?" Rikki asked.

Zane was staring off into space.

"Zane?" Rikki waved her hand in front of Zane's face.

"What?" Zane focused on her. "Did you say something?"

Rikki gave him an odd look before repeating the question. "I asked if everything went all right at the moon pool today?"

"Yeah." Zane said vaguely. "Everything went just...fine."

"Why are you saying that like it's a bad thing?" Will questioned.

"I dunno." Zane looked at the group seriously. He decided he needed to tell the group what was bothering him so much. "There's just something about the way she's acting that doesn't seem quite right. Like she gave up way too easily, you know?"

"Yeah..." Bella realized that Zane had a point.

"But how do we know for sure?" Rikki spoke up. "I mean, you proved her wrong."

"Right." Zane said firmly. "We did. I think she's just being Sophie. I've never really been able to figure her out."

"I'll spend all day tomorrow with her." Will said. "If she asks me too many questions about Bella we'll know that she still thinks something is up."

"That's a good idea." Bella took Will's hand. "And you can keep her away from us."

"Yeah." Zane said thoughtfully. "Everyone needs to stay clear of Sophie. We thought this was all done, but we have got to keep an eye on her."

"No one goes out in the ocean." Bella stated seriously.

"And we avoid Sophie at all costs." Rikki added.

"And hey, this may all be nothing." Zane offered. "She might just be being playing mysterious. We may have nothing to worry about."

"Right." Bella said, unconvinced.

The group left the cafe in pairs. The boys decided to walk the girls to their homes before they headed towards their own houses.

Sophie walked along casually, following the group from a distance as they strolled. She had a moment of indecision as Bella and Will separated from Zane and Rikki. She decided to follow Zane. She wanted to keep an eye on him. She followed the couple, but not too closely.

"It's fine." Zane said, one arm wrapped around Rikki's shoulders. "She doesn't know anything. Don't worry."

Rikki nodded. "I just wish she'd move away or something." She said frustratedly. "I wish we didn't have to watch out for her. Why can't she just mind her own business?"

Zane shrugged and then stopped. He took each of Rikki's shoulders in his hands, forcing her to stand still.

"Rikki," He looked deep into her eyes and spoke seriously. "Everything is fine. You have nothing to worry about."

"Oh, stop." Rikki swatted at Zane's arm as she walked on. She hated having someone babysit over her. "I'm not worried."

"Good." Zane smiled. He was still worried about Sophie, but as long as the girls stayed away from water they should be fine.

Sophie watched Zane walk inside Rikki's house. The door shut behind them. Sophie watched the house for a few more minutes before turning on her heel and strutting away, thinking hard. She hadn't been able to hear what Zane and Rikki had said during their walk, but she had seen the look on Zane's face as he'd talked to Rikki. He'd looked concerned. No, not just concerned. Genuinely worried. This thing with Bella must have had him really freaked out. Well, Sophie told herself, it may not have had Zane too worried but it definitely must have worried Rikki. He must have just been trying to comfort her.

Sophie strolled down the walkway towards Will's boat house. She had a few words she wanted to say to her brother.

Will and Bella had walked along, holding hands gently. They were still trying to convince themselves that everything was back to normal.

"Zane's right." Bella said matter-of-factly. "I mean, all Sophie saw was Zane pour a small bit of water on my arm, and then she just gave up. That's so not like her."

Will couldn't argue. "Well, we'll just have to be really really careful. Like you always are." He grinned down at Bella before giving her a peck on the cheek. "Call me later." He said with a wink.

Will watched Bella walk inside her house before heading towards his boat shed. He pushed open his front door.

"Hello, brother." Came an all too familiar voice.

"Sophie." Will located her, sitting in a chair on the opposite side of the shed.

Sophie stood and walked towards Will. "I just thought I'd drop by. Are you here alone?"

Will looked around himself. "Bella's not here, if that's what you're asking." He muttered.

"I guess she must be out swimming." Sophie said absently, examining her fingernails.

"Sophie." Will spoke definitively. "Bella is not a mermaid."

Sophie giggled coolly. "Are you sure?"

Will walked over to where his sister was sitting and stood over her. "I think I would know. Just leave her alone." Will turned and walked towards the kitchen.

"No." Sophie said simply.

That made Will stop walking. He turned back to Sophie. "No?" He spoke.

"No." Sophie smirked. "I don't think I'm quite done with Bella just yet."

Will rolled his eyes as he crossed his arms. "Why? You've had your fun, and you saw it for yourself. She's normal."

Sophie stood, meeting Will's eyes. "Think about it, Will."

Will's face was vacant. "What?"

"Think about it." Sophie took a step closer to Will, causing him to back up slightly. "Remember when you came to my apartment, begging me not to expose Bella?"

Will shrugged. "I never asked you not to expose her. I asked you to leave her alone. Not to bother her."

"No..." Sophie took another step closer. "You didn't. Do you remember? Because I do."

"What are you talking about, Sophie?" Will was a little nervous, but was doing a pretty good job at keeping his cool.

"You never denied it." Sophie said calmly. "I didn't realize it at the time because of the vague way you answered me then, but you never denied it."

"Sophie-" Will started.

"Stop." Sophie held up a hand, cutting Will off. "You knew exactly what I told Zane, and you came to me to talk me out of exposing her. And you never denied that she was a mermaid. In fact, you basically confirmed it."

"What?" Will's eyes widened. "No I didn't, you're crazy Sophie."

"Hmm..." Sophie pondered. "I told you that she had addled your brain, and I believe your exact words were 'No she hasn't. She's perfectly normal, just a little different.'"

Will shook his head. "I didn't mean that she was a mermaid, Sophie. I just meant that she was..." He trailed off.

"Different." Sophie finished. "I get it, Will. Trust me, I do." Sophie took a bigger step forward.

Will tried to back away, but found himself flat against a wall, unable to move any further away from Sophie.

Sophie's gaze sent shivers up and down Will's spine. He almost didn't recognize his sister.

"My only question," Sophie spoke calmly, "Is where Zane fits in in all this? Does he really care that much for your girlfriend?"

Will swallowed hard. "You're nuts, Sophie. This is all crazy."

"We'll see." Sophie said sweetly. "You know, I thought you might actually want to help me out for once. I guess I was mistaken. I'll be going now."

"No, Sophie, wait." Will reached for her. He didn't know what to say, but he knew he felt safer with her there instead of outside doing who knew what.

"Yes?" Sophie raised her eyebrows expectantly.

"I, uh-" Will stammered. "Let's spend some time together. Reconnect, you know?"

"That sounds fantastic." Sophie said smoothly. "In fact, I feel totally bad about all of this mess, really. Why don't I meet you here tomorrow morning at 9am?"

"That sounds good." Will said as calmly as he could manage.

Sophie started on her way to the door. She paused in the doorway. "And Will," She called. "Be sure to invite Bella as well, I'd love to start making an effort to know her better. Unless that's a problem?" She said innocently.

"No problem." Will managed.

"Great. Glad to hear that there isn't any reason why I shouldn't spend some time with Bella." Sophie smiled. "I'll see you tomorrow, Will."

With that, Sophie stepped out the door, pulling it shut firmly behind her.

7. Involved

Will rushed over to Bella's house as soon as Sophie left. He made a phone call to Zane, who promised to call Rikki and get both of them to Bella's as soon as he could.

"I just don't know what to do." Will said frantically as he paced back and forth through Bella's bedroom. "She knows, Bella. We thought we tricked her but we didn't. We couldn't have."

Will leaned on Bella's desk, deep in thought.

"So, we don't go." Bella said as calmly as she could. "We don't meet with her tomorrow morning. We hide, or something."

"Hide?" Will looked up. "Where do we hide?"

"I don't know." Bella shrugged in exasperation. "But we definitely can't just walk right into her apartment. She'll trap us and that'll be that."

Will nodded in agreement.

The pair heard the front door open and close, followed by a pair of feet running their way up the steps. Rikki and Zane burst into Bella's room, matching expressions of anxiety on their faces.

"What did Sophie say? Tell us everything." Zane demanded as he sat down in Bella's desk chair.

Will sighed before repeating the discussion he'd had with Sophie. Rikki and Zane listened raptly.

"And she expects us, Bella and me, to be at her place at 9am tomorrow. What the hell are we supposed to do?"

"Cancel." Rikki and Zane answered together.

"I know that." Will worried. "But then what?"

No one had an answer for him.

Sophie stood from where she had been sitting beside Bella's house. She had waited outside of Will's boathouse, sure that he would come running out the second she left. She hadn't been disappointed. Will had led her straight to Bella's house, practically running the whole way there.

Sophie had made herself comfortable about half a block up the street. She only had to wait about fifteen minutes before she saw Zane and Rikki dash up the front porch and into the house.

Sophie smirked, satisfied with herself, as she stood. She smoothly turned on her heel and made her way off into the night. This was turning out to be a very interesting evening.

Back in Bella's bedroom, the four kids were in the same places they'd been for the last thirty minutes. No one had a good plan of action for dealing with Sophie. Or any plan at all, good or not.

"Does she know about Rikki?" Zane asked concernedly.

"I don't think so." Will shook his head. "But she did ask about why you were so worried about Bella. It was like she knew something was up. I don't really think she knows about Rikki though."

"Ok good." Zane breathed.

"Good?" Rikki raised her eyebrows. "But what do we do about Bella?"

The silence in the room was deafening. Everyone wracked their brain, but no one could come up with anything even close to resembling a plan.

"Don't leave this house." Will told Bella for the third time.

"I can't just stay in here forever." Bella argued back for a third time.

"But if you leave Sophie may ambush you." Zane stated.

"We've been through this already." Rikki said frustratedly.

"I know, I just don't know where to go from here." Will rubbed at his temples.

"Me either." Zane muttered.

"What if we tell her?" Bella asked quietly. She had been thinking things over, and she didn't see any way of getting out of this. Not now.

"What?" Will didn't believe what he'd just heard.

Bella stood and walked to the middle of the room slowly. "What if we just tell her everything?"

"We aren't telling her about Rikki." Zane said firmly.

"No, I didn't mean we tell her about Rikki." Bella said wearily. "I mean, why don't we just tell her about me? If we work with her maybe she'll be less...um... harsh about things."

"I doubt it." Will said bitterly. "I really don't think that's a great idea, Bella. Sophie won't go easy on you just because you work with her. She just won't have to try so hard. She'll see it as an easy way to get what she wants."

"I just don't see how we have any other choice." Bella sat down on the bed. "She knows, Will."

"Ok." Zane thought aloud. "I have an idea. I don't know that it will work, but do we have any other plans?"

"What is it?" Rikki asked warily.

"I offer her the cafe." Zane said thoughtfully.

"No way." Rikki said firmly.

"Yeah, we can't let you do that." Bella agreed.

"No, listen." Zane spoke to the group. "I love the cafe, but Sophie would probably love a chance to run it. She'd make loads of cash and she wouldn't have to work too hard."

"Yeah, but she wouldn't have to work too hard after she tells the world about Bella either." Will disagreed.

"Still, it's an idea." Zane rebutted.

"Cool it, guys." Bella said from her place on the bed. "Zane, you're not giving up the cafe."

Zane crossed his arms and sank down into the chair. "I'm just saying, she might be willing to make a trade."

"And we really appreciate it." Rikki squeezed Zane's hand. "But we need to come up with a better idea than that. She can make way more money off a mermaid discovery than she can at the cafe, and she knows it."

"I guess." Zane said under his breath. He was upset with himself for not coming up with a solution right away. There had to be a way out of this, he just needed to figure out what it was.

"It's getting late." Will said softly. He pulled out his phone and began to dial Sophie's number slowly.

"Who are you calling?" Bella asked curiously.

"Sophie." Will held the phone to his ear. "I'm cancelling our meeting for tomorrow."

"Wait." Bella reached out quickly and took the phone from Will, clicking it shut. "Don't cancel."

"Why not? I thought we'd agreed that we needed to cancel immediately?" Will asked cluelessly.

"Ok." Bella said thoughtfully. "What if I go over there first, and then you join us a bit later?"

"That's the dumbest idea I've heard yet." Zane said blankly. "Have you gone nuts?"

"I don't have any clue what I'll say to her," Bella started, "But it's me that she knows about, not Rikki. I need to handle this myself. Maybe she'll feel bad for me and give up?"

Everyone thought that that was pretty unlikely, and the expressions on their faces said as much.

"I just don't want to risk her finding out about Rikki, or even Cleo, however far away she is." Bella said. "If I can talk to her at least

I can try to find out what she knows. If I'm honest with her she'll think I'm confiding in her."

"So you just want to walk into Sophie's apartment and tell her straight out that you're a mermaid?" Will began pacing again. "No way."

"She knows, Will." Bella said quietly. "You said so yourself. She didn't believe us when we tried to prove her wrong. She saw me change. We just have to accept the fact that she knows what I am. Our best chance of making the most of this is to work with her."

"I'm not ok with that." Will shook his head.

"Well," Bella stood and walked over to him. "I'm not trying to be insensitive, but I feel like this is my decision."

"Not if you're going to do something stupid!" Will shouted.

Bella looked at Will solemnly. She spoke in a voice so quiet it made Will shiver a bit. "This is my life. If I want to just tell Sophie about me and get things out in the open I should be able to."

Will looked at Bella out of the corner of his eye as he sank down to sit on the floor. Slowly, he pulled his phone out of his pocket and dialed Sophie's number.

"Hey Soph." Will said resentfully. "'I just wanted to let you know that I'll be late to meet you tomorrow morning, but..." He sighed. "Bella will be there on time. 9am. Great."

He clicked the phone shut and dropped it on the floor in front of him. He looked up at Bella. "Happy?" He asked.

"Of course I'm not." Bella worried. "But this seems like the best thing to do. To keep everyone else from being found out."

"I still don't like it." Will said irritably.

"It's late." Zane checked his watch. "What time are you going to Sophie's?" He asked Bella.

"I guess right at 9." Bella said blankly.

"Let's meet up beforehand." Rikki suggested. "Just for one last pep talk before you go over there."

"That would be great." Bella smiled. "Thank you."

Neither Zane nor Will looked up from the floor as the two girls hugged. They were far from alright with Bella's idea.

"Ok." Rikki said calmly. "I can't think anymore tonight. I'm headed to bed."

"I'll walk you." Zane stood.

Rikki took Bella's hand in hers. "This is going to be fine." She said with false confidence. "Don't do anything rash. I'll be here tomorrow at...7? Is that too early."

"I doubt I'll be getting much sleep." Bella admitted. "7 is just fine."

"Ok then." Rikki gave Bella a reassuring smile before heading for the door. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Zane followed Rikki wordlessly. He locked eyes with Will on the way out. There was no way they were going to allow Bella to walk right into Sophie's arms, and they both knew it. Zane broke the eye lock as he followed Rikki downstairs and out the front door.

As the door shut behind Rikki and Zane, Will walked over to Bella and pulled her tightly into his arms. "We're going to figure this out." He said for what felt like the thousandth time.

Bella nodded, unconvinced, but determined to take things into her own hands.

Zane and Rikki walked towards Rikki's home, hand in hand. They didn't have much to say to one another, and each of them were deep into their own thoughts as they walked.

"Bella's smart." Rikki reassured herself. "She knows what she's doing."

Zane was walking briskly, heatedly. He couldn't stand the fact that the situation was out of his control. He wasn't used to being powerless and he wasn't thrilled about it.

"Hey." Rikki caught his attention. "Stop it."

"Stop what?" Zane said angrily.

"Stop blaming yourself." Rikki said firmly. "Between you and Will it's a major guilt-fest around here nowadays."

"I should be able to take care of this." Zane stated. "I'm going to figure it out."

"Listen to me." Rikki stopped walking and took both of Zane's hands in hers. "This was going to happen eventually."

"What?" Zane frowned. "What do you mean?"

Rikki spoke carefully. "I mean, this was wonderful while it lasted, but it was bound to come out sooner or later. At some point one of us will be discovered. At least if Bella works with Sophie she might get more of a say in how things go."

Zane pulled away from Rikki and kept walking. "She's being stupid." He spat out as he walked.

"Don't say that." Rikki ran to keep up with him. "She's trying to do what she thinks is right."

"Yeah?" Zane turned to Rikki forcefully. "And what about when people start putting the pieces together, hm? It's only a matter of time before people realize that you never go into the water either, or that and Bella disappear together all the time. What then?"

Rikki thought hard. "Then we'll figure things out when the time comes." She said quietly.

"Yeah, you will." Came a cold, familiar voice.

Rikki and Zane whipped around to face the voice. Sophie stood calmly, her hands crossed loosely over her chest.

Zane stepped in front of Rikki protectively. "What do you want, Sophie?" He asked warily.

"Ah, Zane." Sophie tilted her head to the side slightly. "I never thought you would let me down on something like this. Of course, I didn't realize how deeply Rikki was involved until just recently."

"What are you talking about?" Zane said boldly.

"Nothing much." Sophie said casually as she took one step closer to the pair. "But let's see just how involved you actually are."

Before Zane or Rikki could move, Sophie unfolded her arms. Clapsed tightly in one hand was a bottle of water.

"Rikki, run!" Zane tried to shove her out of the way, but they didn't move fast enough.

Sophie whipped the open bottle towards Zane and Rikki, sending a stream of water onto the pair.

"Get out of here, now!" Zane desperately tried to help Rikki dash away, but they were in an open area of the beach. Rikki couldn't make it to the water in time.

Sophie watched in triumphant amazement as Rikki's legs became one long fin. Rikki collapsed into Zane's arms. Zane all but fell onto the sand as he caught Rikki.

Both of them looked up at Sophie in fear as she walked casually to them

Rikki lay in Zane's arms. Zane held her tightly. There was no hiding her from Sophie's eyes.

"Well, Zane." Sophie said coolly, raising one eyebrow. "It looks like you've been holding out on me."

End
file.